



Crossroads Cultural Center Advisory Board Meeting

Saturday, May 14, 2001

The America Bible Society, New York, NY

Keynote address by Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete: *What is Essential to Our Humanity?*

Crossroads: Good afternoon and welcome to the fifth annual meeting of the Crossroads Advisory Board. My name is Angelo Sala and I am the President of Crossroads. First of all I would like to give a heartfelt thanks to the Chairman of the Board, Msgr. Albacete, and to all our other distinguished members for having found the time in their very busy schedule to spend almost the entire day with us. Besides the members from New York, some have come from Chicago, some from Washington. And thanks to all of you for having accepted the invitation to participate in our Advisory Board as observers: it is the second time we've opened this event to the public because, based on the experience of our past meetings, we believe that the keynote address by Msgr. Albacete and the following discussion among the Board members is something very worthwhile. Further, it provides us with the opportunity to know each other better. Finally, let me thank, very warmly, the American Bible Society and our great friend Mario Paredes for the generous hospitality they have provided for today's event, as well as Alicia de Frange whose help in organizing all of this has been invaluable.

As in the past years, in the last 12 months Crossroads' activities have been as numerous in numbers as rich in variety. We have organized 31 public events in 5 cities in the U.S., promoted two theatrical productions, and after having started our activities in Chicago and Houston in 2010, in 2011, we opened a branch in Boston. And Los Angeles may be next.

One of the most recurring positive remarks about our cultural center is that it witnesses to a broad array of interests; it is concerned with many different disciplines and human activities. We are very grateful for these comments, because a lack of interest in reality would mark not only the end of any cultural center, but above all the decline of our humanity into a progressive nihilism. However, we know very well that we live in a time where an overexposure of stimuli from reality, as well as a large selection of opportunities and relationships, not necessarily implies an increase in our interests and desires. Quite the opposite! Therefore, we do not want to take for granted this very valuable characteristic of our cultural center. We've felt the need to become more aware of our origin, and above all of what can sustain this openness and curiosity with respect to what is "out there." And we've felt that this topic would be interesting not only in order to run a cultural center, but also to live our everyday life. This is the reason why we asked our Board to do its job, that is, to advise us by exploring this subject, first through the address of our chairman, Msgr. Albacete, and then through a discussion among its members.

We have no time to introduce our various board members. They are here; we invite you to get to know them at the end, around a cup of coffee. And you will find their bios on our website. On the technical side, at the end of Msgr. Albacete's address, there will be a 45-minute discussion and Q&A. And now, Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete.

Albacete: Thank you. Save your applause for the end.

The origin of today's reflections, thoughts, suggestions, provocations, is a comment, a reference I made at the last board meeting when Fr. Julián Carrón was here about American nihilism based on an article that I had read back in 2007 in *Harper's Magazine* by Curtis White, and I read a little bit of it, and it apparently provoked an interest, and I was asked to continue to expand that view suggested by Mr. White to describe the general condition of American Christianity in terms of its effect on the culture around us, the dominant culture, and so I thought, well, let's start with that. And then after that I intend to see the same concern expressed by Fr. Giussani in the article that you have on Chernobyl that was sent out for you to read if you were able to, and after that I would like to finish with the Pope's application of all of this to the pursuit of a new culture. That's more or less what I intend to do; whether I'll do it, I have no idea.

First, the nihilism quote—this comes from *Harper's Magazine*, December 2007. He says he wants to talk about the Gnostic character of the soup we call Christianity in the United States today. The article's subtitle is "Hot Air Gods," a reference to the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah who speak of the pagan idols as "hot air gods."

When we assert, "This is my belief," says White, we are invoking our right to have our own private conviction, no matter how ridiculous, not only tolerated politically, but respected by others. It says, "I've invested a lot of emotional energy in this belief, and in a way I've staked the credibility of my life on it. So if you ridicule it, you can expect a fight."

In this kind of culture, says White, "Yahweh and Baal - my God and yours - stroll arm-in-arm, as if to do so were the model of virtue itself." In this kind of culture, Baal stands for everything that was considered idolatrous by the Jews in the pagan world, and Yahweh, the one and only true God. In this kind of culture, Yahweh and Baal get along very well. And they "stroll arm-in-arm" showing that they are not hurting each other, and that this itself is what is seen as virtue. This is the ideal situation. Later on you'll tell me whether you think he's right or not.

"What we require of belief is not that it make sense but that it be sincere. This is so even for our more secular convictions... Clearly, this is not the spirituality of a centralized orthodoxy. It is a sort of workshop spirituality that you can get with a cereal-box top and five dollars. And yet in our culture, to suggest that such belief is not deserving of respect makes people anxious, an anxiety that expresses itself in the desperate sincerity with which we deliver life's little lessons... There is an obvious problem with this form of spirituality: it takes place in isolation. Each of us sits at our computer terminal tapping out our convictions... Consequently, it's difficult to avoid the conclusion that our truest belief is the credo of heresy itself. It is heresy without an orthodoxy. It is heresy as an orthodoxy."

Now, as I understand it, the claim here expands on what he has already said. Given this getting along between Yahweh and Baal, given that this is seen as the very essence of virtue, he says this actually leads to a spiritual life "in isolation." The first thing it makes impossible is a community, a real authentic community of people sharing these original insights that give meaning to their lives. A

community may appear, but it is a community of isolated individuals; that is to say, it is a community sustained by the very same reality that communities are meant to break through. I hope I've made it clear. That isolation is there, and it becomes the orthodoxy—the fact that there is no unifying set of convictions, but each one has his or her own, but bringing them together, making sure they don't hurt each other, is a community built on heresy, an orthodoxy built on heresy, he says. In fact, "it is heresy as orthodoxy."

When the political freedom of religion has been broadened to the dogma that "everyone is free to believe whatever he likes," says White, there is no real shared conviction at all, and hence no church and certainly no community. Strangely, our freedom to believe has achieved the condition that Nietzsche called nihilism, but by a route he never imagined." While European nihilists just denied God, "American nihilism is something different. Our nihilism is our capacity to believe in everything and anything all at once. It's all good!"

"We would prefer to be left alone, warmed by our beliefs-that-make-no-sense, whether they are the quotidian platitudes of ordinary Americans, the mystical thinking of New Age Gnostics, the teary-eyed patriotism of social conservatives, or the perfervid loyalty of the rich to their free-market Mammon. We are thus the congregation of the Church of the Infinitely Fractured, splendidly alone together. And apparently that's how we like it. Our pluralism of belief says both to ourselves and to others, 'Keep your distance'."

"And yet isn't this all strangely familiar? Aren't these the false gods that Isaiah and Jeremiah confronted, the cults of the 'hot air gods'? The gods that couldn't scare birds from a cucumber patch? Belief of every kind and cult, self-indulgence and self-aggrandizement of every degree, all flourish. And yet God is abandoned."

These are the reflections of a non-Christian which he calls "Christ-less Christianity."

Reading this, two things have occurred to me: First, does it reflect what I experience living, seeking to live at peace, in today's cultural atmosphere? This is a cultural center and its public activities should all reflect on how the environmental culture that surrounds you...on a judgment about it, a description of it. We need to understand well the cultural environment in which we operate, without initial prejudices, based most of all on our own experiences of seeking to adhere to our Catholic belief in such a culture because the first thing we have, I'm sure, I don't even apologize; all of us here have this problem— Can our belief be sustained not in a purely intellectual way, but in an experiential way? Can the freedom that we say the Catholic orthodoxy, the Catholic truth, makes possible, can that persist, can that be done living in this culture? Or should we just try to separate from the dominant culture and try to recreate something that we liked better in the past, or just build walls around it, and wait to see what happens in the future, and now and then sniff out to see if the situation has improved, and then send agents out to infiltrate, or something like that? What exactly is the experience of the surrounding culture that animates, that gives birth to the activities that we promote? I believe each one of them and

its usefulness and even having them should be judged from this perspective. If they contribute nothing, we are wasting time. We are adding to the problem.

Number two, if this view is true, either totally or partially, how do we get out of this situation? What is the best response to a culture as described by White? He has his own; after all, the man is a nonbeliever. At the end of the article, he proposes how one makes sense of this and breaks out of it. The translation of language, of the old cultural situation to the present time, and back and forth, etc... You can read it yourself: <http://billtotten.blogspot.com/2008/02/hot-air-gods.html>

But what do we say about this? How do we get out of this? What do we propose to everyone? To the Church, especially to our brothers and sisters in the Church, what do we propose in order that we be set free from being captured by this kind of cultural reduction?

One of the false responses to it, but which you see a lot, is the version of Christianity that is a source of ethics. One of the ways that we respond to this according to this point of view is to help society recall the values upon which the ethics that came to us once together was built, a kind of moralism, but then again moralism is already a word that sounds negative. We don't like *isms*. But I ask you to take it in the best possible way. Is the proper response here an ethical one? Is it presenting the society with an ethical proposal that we believe will bring everyone together? Michael S. Horton writes that this attitude that...

...typically moralizes or allegorizes these stories, we are taught by Jesus himself to understand these passages in light of their place in the unfolding drama of redemption that leads to Christ. Moralistic preaching, the bane of conservatives and liberals alike, assumes that we're not really not helpless sinners that need to be rescued, but decent folks who just need a few good examples, exhortations, and instructions. However, Goldsworthy continues, "we are not saved by our changed lives, the changed life is the result of being saved and not the basis of it. The basis of salvation is the perfection in the life and death of Christ presented in our place. By reverting to either allegorical interpretation on the one hand or to prophetic literalism on the other some Evangelicals have thrown away the hermeneutical gains of the Reformers in favor of a Medieval approach to the Bible. Evangelicals have had a reputation for taking the Bible seriously," Grahame Goldsworthy concludes, "but even they have traditionally propagated the idea of the short devotional reading from which a blessing from the Lord must be rested... The pivotal point of turning in Evangelical thinking which demands close attention is the change that has taken place from the Protestant emphasis... to the Medieval emphasis on the inner life."

How do we get out of this? That's where we were before I read this. The reduction of the proposal to ethics, to an ethical way of life, is one possibility. This author says the problem with that is that it's not Christianity. Christianity begins with the experience of being saved, and then seeks to live that experience in the surrounding culture in all its defining points—at work, in human relations, in politics, in economics, etc... It's not the other way around; you don't reform those areas in order to be saved, but

you give witness to being saved. The saving initiative of God in Christ comes first. That is to say, what save us are the facts of the life of Christ and of His death and resurrection, not the ethical consequences of it by the right wing or left wing. This was the heart of the Protestant Reformation, and basically it has been lost by the vast majority of Protestants, as seen in the interpretation of the Bible as basically an inspiring source of moral behavior, again, both for left wing or right wing purposes. So that is this man's criticism to the moralistic solution of how to deal with the dominant culture.

Now, it is interesting that this man arguing on behalf of the purity of the Reformation says that the problem is that the moralistic people have emphasized the inner life or life as it is, and guilty of that is the Catholic Church. That is to say, just when you think that he is on the verge of giving a Catholic criticism of this view, it turns out the Catholic Church is as guilty of it as he sees the mainstream Protestant churches and the Evangelical Fundamentalists. The accusation here is that at a certain point the Catholic Church, around the Middle Ages, began to emphasize the inner life, and progress in faith became identified with progress in one's inner life. This he sees, as a real Protestant should, as a great error that demands reformation. So the whole idea of reformation was to make sure that the point of departure of the Christian life are the events that brought about our salvation. By ourselves we do not have the inner strength or the various degrees, the inclination, because of original sin. The Catholic Church holds exactly the same thing, but here it is accused of actually leading the corruption of Christian thought and Christian life.

Is this criticism of the Catholic Church valid? Does it account with what we know or with what we experience today? For that matter, we weren't alive back in the Middle Ages, so the question for us is—is this criticism of the Catholic Church valid today? Is the Catholic Church today substituting inner life experiences to the facts of history that brought about our salvation? Is the Catholic Church today responding to the original nihilistic culture? Is the Catholic Church today, in that response, insisting that the Christian events are first in the life of Christ, and this leads to a changed life? Or is it saying that, but in applying the results of this event, it sees it only in terms of spiritual perfection? What do we think about that? Because that also will affect the tone or shade of what we choose to do in public as a cultural center. If we agree on these basic points, then the question is: How does the proposal for this particular activity reflect this conviction? Otherwise we're just people who have free time and nothing else to do.

If the criticism is correct, what do we propose instead? If it is not correct, what do we propose anyway? Basically the symptoms that we should look at begin to show themselves in our attitude, in our interpretation of the Bible because indeed Christianity exists because that initiative was taken by God, and the only source, it seems to be to the Protestant, is the Bible. The Catholic Church recognizes that and says that indeed the Bible is the Word of God; that is to say, through the reading of the Bible, the proclamation of the Bible, we are being spoken to by God. The Word of God is not information about God; it is a call from God. The Word is a call from God. Therefore, our view of how the Bible is the Word of God is a crucial symptom to look at to see what our view of the dominant culture is, and our response to it as a cultural center. We cannot avoid this point. It is not, therefore, a lucky chance that we're offered a place like the American Bible Society to have our meeting, and I think this is a sign in itself that we come here. Again, nobody thought of it as a sign; it was just available, but that's how signs happen, and here we are. If we cannot reach an agreement on how we interpret the Bible as the Word of God, then we won't be able to go much further than this to go to the next point.

For those of you who are intellectually or theologically inclined, I recommend an article in the last issue of *Communio* on the interpretation of the Bible according to Pope Benedict XVI based on his two

books on Jesus. There he suggests a slight problem that can't really be fixed because the language doesn't allow it, with the word used by the Pope that when translated to English shows less than what the original German word uses. The word is *gestalt*. The Pope says that the purpose of his study, the purpose of Biblical hermeneutics of interpretation is to discover more and more how the unifying reality that makes the Bible with all its diversity and even contradictions that makes it the Word of God, that unifying principle is the gestalt of Jesus Christ. And a Catholic way he proposes of approaching the Bible is to read it in the light of the desire to know, to discover more, to see more clearly the gestalt of Jesus of Nazareth. The translation says, "The figure of Jesus of Nazareth." But, as this article insists, and it's true, gestalt means much more than just the figure; it's like the weight—you see the Johannine words we use—the glory, the power of the presence, the characteristics; your gestalt is you, but it includes things like, do early morning noises bother you, or not? And if you find out, I know people very well for whom early morning noises define the whole day, and it characterizes everything for the rest of the day. My brother is like that, so I spend the night praying for a quiet morning because I know it will take up our whole day. It's as ridiculously ordinary as that. The gestalt is the shape of the personality, taste, etc...; it's not just the figure; it's not just an image; it is a powerful presence. I like to use the words *glory* and *light* and *weight*. These are Johannine terms.

For example, when I saw Mother Teresa and I was able to have lunch with her and a bunch of very beautiful-looking cardinals, and the Blessed Pope John Paul II—when I first met him he was having breakfast and stuffing himself with Corn Flakes. He was a very powerful presence, and yet without any of the props. He had a weight of a presence and it was not produced by show business. You could get any Mickey Mouse to come out on a balcony in white and look impressive. Well, he didn't need this. His humanity had that weight. That was his gestalt. The same for Mother Teresa, when she came into the room all of these other dignitaries shrank in size like mad. She who physically was a little thing, showed a tremendous weight of presence which I experienced.

This is what we look for concerning Jesus, the weight of his presence when we read Sacred Scripture, when we interpret it. He calls it a "Christocentric Hermeneutic." This powerful way of reading, that reveals more and more of the gestalt of Christ, is what should guide us, is what he calls what creates the canon of Sacred Scripture. Jesus Christ, His power of presence, is the interpretation of Scripture. As St. John says when Jesus says, "I Am the grammar of Moses."

At this point, our activities should express the desire that we and others that come to us will have a perception, deeper or perhaps for the first time, of the attraction of the gestalt of Jesus as it shows itself, not in sermons or preaching, but in the very activities and interest we show because there are two symptoms that indicate progress in the experience of discovering the gestalt of Jesus: One is a certain joy, and the other one is an expanding range of interests, an interest in the human and its expressions, as it is today in the life of the presence of the gestalt of Jesus. That is one point. The other is the joy—a joy which is completely compatible and, in fact, so often tied to suffering and pain and emotional disgust even at the injustices we have to look at. And even initial provocation of the things that happen, certainly natural disasters. I'm thinking of the earthquake in Spain. I don't know how many ancient churches fell. Thank God they didn't kill anyone like they did in Haiti where they killed the archbishop. You begin to say, "Hey, what's going on?" When you refuse to not look away, but to face that, and I see in there the gestalt of Jesus. And the answer is, yes, I will experience something, for lack of a better word, that we call a joy. Totally compatible with the disgust at the injustice. You see it in Christ himself confronting the death of Lazarus, and his reaction to the son of the widow of Naim. First he cries. There's no question he's disgusted by what he sees, and yet he works a miracle that shows the power of his presence.

So the promotion of the growing range of interests from the perspective of what it tells us about the presence of Christ today, of the Risen Christ, is a test, I believe, in judging what we do as a Catholic cultural center.

My opinion is that this commentary on Wright and his criticism, his view of American nihilism, of the Christianity that characterizes the majority of Americans today, at least the culturally acceptable, is basically correct. I think his secular solution to it is, of course, incorrect. I didn't even print it out. The Protestant response, the criticism made by the Protestants who agree with Wright is basically true. That is to say, the inner life, the spiritual life, has taken the place of "the event," to use Giussani's terms. The power of Christianity that makes present the gestalt of Jesus has been lost because we have fallen back to the religious sense. Those words are even a more radical criticism of the incorrect Catholic response to the cultural challenge that Horton gives here with his view of the betrayal of the Reformation. But in as far as he goes in the criticism of what has happened—the reform of the reform, as far as he goes, he is correct. What is missing? What is missing that we find in Giussani that hits the nail on the head? You can also see it in the speeches and writings of Pope Benedict XVI. What is missing here? What is missing in the Protestant solution of the need to reform the Reformation, of the Protestant concern that it has been turned into a matter of spirituality and not obedience to a salvific event in the life of Jesus. What is missing? What is missing is that this still remains a discourse. The criticism may be intellectually correct and brilliant, and I think it is, it may indicate the way to respond to this, but it doesn't move you; it doesn't give you power to do so; it remains something that gets you excited when you read about it. You say, "Oh man, yeah, he's so right." And for how long does that last? What is missing is when Giussani says, "The experience of Jesus is a saving event here and now, in my life, at this moment, at this place. Because if that is not present, then everything really remains an abstraction about the past. Jesus is a museum figure. Or, as Fr. Giussani says, "Jesus will have failed."

So I see the point of Protestants who call for a reform of the Reformation; I see that it applies to a lot of the Catholic catechesis or teachings, etc...and that we have to also be removed from this reduction to the religious sense, but to me the response, how to do it, the Protestant is missing the aspect of here and now. What does one call the aspect of here and now? Can we find a shorter word? A word that should remind us of a here and now because it's a vehicle that makes it possible? And that word is *sacrament*. What is missing is a sacramental view of reality and therefore the Church, because it is through the sacrament that the here and now occurs within the life of the Church. Before it narrows further to particular charisms, like the one that animates us—Communion and Liberation. As Fr. Giussani insists again and again, it is first for us the charism, the community that keeps us together. The interest, emotion, whatever keeps us together, is a way of living the sacramental nature of the Church. This, of course, is totally missing from the Protestant interpretation, even the good one here, whereas for us it is the key.

We had a retreat for priests, whoever wanted to go. Maybe some were fake priests; I don't know. We have it every Easter week. It was made possible by the Knights of Columbus. Anyway, one priest at the retreat said to me, "Thank you, because I have one a bet. I had bet fifty bucks that you could not get through this retreat without making a reference to the Collège des Bernardins. You might wonder, what the heck is that? Right now I'm thinking, well, it's really something; we are at the American Bible Society. I would have thought that to be disuse of Protestantism, but it was a total misjudgment. Actually, it is a sign of where we are to go, to the Word of God. "It's emblematic," as the Pope says. Collège des Bernardins is a place in France where Pope Benedict XVI addressed the world of culture. Why can't I get to address the world of culture? I mean, that is real class. First of all, everything was in

French. Even though *gestalt* is a German word, the French words for it are much more beautiful. Le Collège des Bernardins is a place where monastic life began to shape the European culture, and the Pope went to visit it and addressed the world of culture today. Certainly, yes, in Europe, but in the whole West and in a certain sense, as he makes clear in his book, (the interview with the German journalist, Peter Seewald) even in those areas of the world like Africa and Asia and Latin America where the situation seems to be much more positive than it is up north, even in that area you can see the virus of the problem. We need to see how faith encounters culture and the particular recommendation the Pope makes, which I second, is that we study very well and frequently the talk that he gave at Collège des Bernardins. So I would like to conclude with a very brief summary of that. Again, you can find it on the Internet:

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2008/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20080912_parigi-cultura_en.html

By the way, Msgr. Giussani's view of the cultural pollution, if you wish, is in the article on Chernobyl. This cultural pollution has squeezed out this virus that spreads, has squeezed out experiential content and thus abandoned the Christian faith and Christian proposal to manipulation by power. It's exactly the same, but perhaps a clearer and more powerful criticism. But then again, it leads to the question: How do we respond to it? One way is we don't respond to it by having cultural meetings. Alright Angelo, let's shut this whole damn thing down! It's written right here. Well, you'll figure out what it means; you have the text.

In Le Collège des Bernardins address, the Pope reflects, these people who came together in the monastic community, what were they looking for? What was the purpose of this behavior? Was it to withdraw from the decaying cultural atmosphere which dominated at that time? No. They had no intention of withdrawing from anything. In fact, one wonders whether one can withdraw. Second, they were not concerned about transforming any culture or giving birth to a new culture. Rather, they were concerned with an attitude that they expressed much better because they expressed it in Latin, *quaerere Deum*, to look for God. Now that already sounds intimidating, and you hate to run into someone and say, "How are you doing?" And he answers, "I'm looking for God." I like to think of it in terms of my old school, vulgar hermeneutics, *What in hell's name is going on?*—I want to know what's happening. Hey! What's happening here in this cultural atmosphere of relativism, secularism, moralism? Can anyone explain to me what's going on? That is why these guys got together, says the Pope in a much more fancy way—to find what is essential. Essential to what? Essential to our humanity, to a fully human life? And to have the basis of hope that what we desire, what makes us happy is possible. Essential for that. In the end, as Giussani insists, we need to awaken. The Chernobyl Effect has put our experience of the "I" to sleep. We need something to awaken it, and care about ourselves. These guys had that. They cared about themselves, so they wanted to find out how to remain this way. What was essential? To find the essential, to separate it in some way, at least to see it through the ephemeral.

I will have you know that my very body lives this search. You see my hands shaking? I thought it was Parkinson's disease. I was prepared to cast myself at the mercy of Blessed John Paul II, although he's already done a Parkinson's miracle. But in any case, the doctor told me, "You don't have Parkinson's; you have something called *Essential tremors*. I was so relieved they were essential because I would hate to have ephemeral tremors!

In describing the atmosphere, Fr. Giussani says that you must come together, set free by this power of the presence of Christ here and now. Going back to the Pope, these guys came together with no cultural agenda, but because they were interested in what is essential.

Now, us, right now, we're not off running to a monastery, to monastic life, but we must be doing the same thing. We must be interested in everything to find out from the experiences of others what is essential to our humanity. What if somebody asked you as a Crossroads Cultural Center member of the board, what do you think is in danger of being lost that is essential if our humanity is to survive and indeed reach its potential, reach its destiny, reach the satisfaction of its desire? What is missing? What makes it essential? Maybe some of you can run out to some kind of monastery, but most of us won't, so this is the kind of thing we should do together.

And now the Pope goes into a fantastic summary of how this proceeds. Guided, empowered by this need to know what is essential, as Christians they realize that the answer lies in understanding what the heck the Word of God means. We repeat again, *word* is not just informational word, but a word that calls you; it is something that addresses you. So what does that mean? What does the Word of God say? Where do we find it? We will find (a word is a word, after all) the Word of God is expressed in human language. So suddenly we have to become interested in human language because if we don't understand how it works, then we won't be able to distinguish or recognize the Word of God that comes through it. Today perhaps you would not say *human language*. You would say *communications*. Unless we understand how the people of this culture communicate, we have no vehicle with which to let them hear the communication, the Word, the call of God himself.

So, the Pope says, again guided by this desire for the essential, these people turn to language; they establish a library. Well the library can't just sit there; it should be used. Well, they did. They put it to use. How? They established a school. The task now of finding an expressive voice essential to our humanity becomes one of education.

There is another interesting observation which goes on for quite a time. The Pope says that another symptom that we are in the right way or in the wrong way, there is nothing there, and that is (get a hold of this!) music, singing. Well, I guess that sends me to hell. And the Pope recognizes that there's a funny aspect—those who can't really sing should shut up. But here the argument is not just the private tastes of this pope, or even traditional, but an insight; what is it? What is this insight? What does singing express in a way that nothing else can about what is happening, about the presence of anyone, of a word if it's there? The answer is harmony, unity, solidarity, so much so that Saint Augustine described his view of things before his conversion as experiencing living in a *region of dissimilarity*. The enslavement to original sin was an inability to get out of this region of dissimilarity. And some of the leading monastic authors like Saint Bernard used that phrase in their commentary concerning the singing of the monks and the need to create a zone of similarity. And this is only one aspect of what these guys were doing that we have to, in a sense, update with our current situation.

The other aspect of the monastic experience, inseparable from this one, is the expression of all of this in the area of work—*ora et labora*. Totally inseparable. Why? Because our work is an expression of our faith in God as the Creator. This year's Easter vigil homily of the Pope was entirely dedicated (this is on the resurrection) to the need that without any experience of our responsibility for creation, we will never encounter the risen Christ. We will be totally on the wrong path. It is absolutely necessary to have the same initial point of departure in the sense of responsibility because in the Book of Genesis, this is what defines the human. Before anything else, this is what defines the image and likeness of God, the mission of developing the creation. Creation is not over. It's taking place now. Unless work is seen in those terms, whatever it is that we do, whatever area of the human adventure we work, if we don't see it this way, we're going to miss everything else because the experience of it is the expression

that everything else is, so to speak, right, that our orientation to reality is one that in the end will allow through sheer Grace and love of God the gestalt of Jesus to appear today, here and now, in this world of ours, and dispel the doubts that obscure.